

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

Remarks at a Campaign Rally in Virginia Beach, Virginia
July 13, 2012

The President. Hello, Virginia Beach! Thank you! It is good to be back in Virginia!

A couple of people I want to acknowledge. First of all, please give Ricki a big round of applause. We are so proud of her, not just for introducing me—that's not that big a deal—*[laughter]*—but her serving her country, first in uniform herself and then as a military spouse. She is an example of what is best about America, and we could not be prouder of her.

A couple other people I want to acknowledge. First of all, your outstanding former Governor and soon-to-be United States Senator, Tim Kaine. Your outstanding former Governor and already Senator, Mark Warner. We've got your Second Congressional District candidate, Paul Hirschbiel is here.

And I want to give a special acknowledgement to somebody who's not here, but who we will always remember. She was a true trailblazer, not just here in Virginia, but across the country, and did so much for so many. So we are truly blessed to have known and we profoundly miss State Senator Yvonne Miller, who is now in a better place. And our thoughts and prayers go out to her family. Her two brothers were here—I had a chance to meet them—and we're so proud of them.

Audience member. We love you!

The President. I love you back.

Now, some of you may have noticed that we are in campaign season. I know that's surprising to many of you. *[Laughter]* I don't suppose you've seen any advertising on TV. *[Laughter]* You know, we are seeing more money spent than any time in American history, a lot of it undisclosed, coming from folks who can write \$10 million checks. Most of the ads are negative; in fact, almost all of the ads are negative. And it's understandable that as you watch these TV ads, that you start thinking that politics just doesn't seem to get what's going on in your lives, that there's so much negativity and so much cynicism. And it's understandable if at a certain point, people just say, you know what, there's a disconnect here, this is not speaking to me, it's not speaking to what's going on in my neighborhood, in my community.

But I just want to remind everybody that in 2008, there were a lot of folks who didn't believe either in the possibilities of change. There were folks that counted us out, people who were sure that a guy named Barack Obama could not be elected President. *[Laughter]* And what we—and so the reason we came together was not because we thought it was a sure thing; it was because we shared a set of values. We believed in the basic bargain that has been the bedrock of this Nation for well over 200 years.

And I was thinking as I was about to come out about this, which will be my last campaign——

Audience members. No!

The President. No, no, I mean, there's a term limit thing in the Presidency. This isn't like Congress; I can't just keep on running. *[Laughter]*

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. But it made me think about my first campaigns, my earliest campaigns, and the reason I got into politics in the first place. Some of you know my grandparents were part of that World War II, Great Depression generation. And my grandfather fought in Patton's Army and my grandmother worked on a bomber assembly line. And when my grandfather came back—at that point my mom had been born—he was able to go to college because of the GI bill. And they were able to buy their first home with some help from the FHA.

And then my mother—she was a single mom—my dad left before I even remembered him. But she was still able to give me and my sister this unbelievable education—because of scholarships and grants and the fact that she was willing to work hard so that she could work and go to school at the same time and raise two kids.

And then I think about Michelle's family. Her dad, he was a blue-collar worker, worked at the water filtration plant in Chicago. And even though he had MS—so he—by the time I met him, he couldn't really walk. He had to use two canes. And he'd have to wake up an hour early, earlier than everybody else, to get to work—just to put on his clothes and get ready for work. But he never missed a day's work.

And Michelle's mom, she stayed at home and looked after Michelle and her brother until they got older, and then worked as a secretary most of her life. And yet, despite these modest beginnings, Michelle and her brother Craig could go to the best schools on Earth, and rise up to do extraordinary things.

So in my first campaign, when I thought about why am I getting into politics, the reason was because we—my family, Michelle's family—we had benefited from this basic American bargain. This idea, at the heart of this Nation, that if you're willing to work hard, if you are willing to take responsibility, then you are not constrained by the circumstances of your birth. You can go as far as your dreams can take you. If you're willing to work hard, then you can find a job that supports a family. And you can have a home to call your own. And you won't be bankrupt when you get sick. And even if you weren't born into wealth, you can make sure your kids get a great education and go on to college. Maybe you can take a vacation once in a while.

I was up in Ohio talking about my favorite vacation. When I was 11 years old, my grandmother, my mother, my sister and me, we traveled the country, but we didn't do it on jets. [*Laughter*] We took Greyhound and the train, and I think twice we rented a car. And we'd stay at Howard Johnson's. And if there was a pool somewhere, no matter—it could look like a puddle it could be so small—[*laughter*]—I was so excited. And you'd go to the ice machine and the vending machine—I was 11 years old; that was a big deal filling up that bucket of ice and getting that soda. [*Laughter*]

And the point was that your vacation didn't have to be fancy. It just gave you a sense of how you could spend time with each other. That was part of that American Dream. And then the notion that you could retire with dignity and respect after a lifetime of work.

That's the idea that got me into politics, because my feeling was, given how much this country had given me and given Michelle, I wanted to make sure that that same bargain held for the next generation, that it wasn't just about me, it was about making sure that every American had those same opportunities.

And the interesting thing is, when I first started running for the U.S. Senate, let's say, in Illinois, and I'd be driving around and we'd go to downstate Illinois and small farm towns, or sometimes we'd be in the big cities like Chicago, no matter who you met, they had those same stories in their background. Black, White, Latino, Asian—it didn't matter—they remembered

their parents or their grandparents or great-grandparents, some of them immigrants, some of them brought here not by choice, but each successive generation believing that this Union could be perfected and that if they really worked hard and were able to overcome whatever barriers in their way, that they could succeed.

So I ran in 2008 because I felt that that bargain wasn't reaching enough people. And the reason so many of you supported me in 2008 was because you understood that that dream was slipping away for too many people.

Audience members. Yes!

The President. That we had gone through a decade in which wages and incomes weren't going up no matter how hard you worked, while the costs of everything from college to health care to groceries to gas kept on going up and people worrying that maybe their kids might not do as well as they did, when the idea was always that your kids do better than you do.

Audience members. Yes!

The President. And so that's what brought us together. The campaign in 2008 was not about a single candidate. It wasn't about me. It was about us and our desire to make sure that the American Dream continues for the next generation and the generation after that and the generation after that.

And what—now, what we didn't realize at the time was we were about to confront the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression: millions of people thrown out of work, folks losing the value of their homes. And so in some ways, that dream seemed even further away. But you know, we've worked hard over the last 3½ years to try to restore that belief that in this country you can make it if you try.

And that's how we were able to save an auto industry. When some said let's let Detroit go bankrupt, we said we're going to bet on American workers and American industry—and now GM is back on top, and Ford and Chrysler are selling cars—because we believe in that American promise. Business started getting back to basics, and we've now created more than 4.4 million new jobs, more than 500,000 manufacturing jobs created during this time.

We've seen all across the country folks who got laid off retrained, go back to a community college and be able to find a new job in a new industry; small businesses struggling, sometimes keeping their doors open even though they're not taking a salary because they know their employees depend on them and their families depend on them.

It's turned out that America is tougher than any tough times. But what we also understand is we've still got more work to do, because, Virginia, the reason I ran and the reason you supported me wasn't just to get back to where we were in 2007, the reason we came together was to restore that promise for middle class families and all who are striving to get into the middle class. That's what we're fighting for. And we've got a lot more work to do on that front.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Now, I've got to tell you: This election in some ways is going to be more important than 2008, because after 3½ years of not getting much help from the other side—

Audience members. Boo!

The President. —I think what's fair to say is, is that we now have a stalemate in Washington. Solving our problems, making sure that good jobs are created here in the United

States, making sure that those good jobs pay and have basic benefits, making sure that we're bringing down our deficit in a responsible way, making sure that we maintain cutting-edge industries here in the United States, making sure we've got the best education system possible—we know how to do those things. What's holding us back is not an absence of new ideas; it's not a lack of solutions. It's the fact that there are two fundamentally different visions about how we move this country forward.

And so this election is about more than just two candidates or two political parties, Virginia. This is about which direction we take this Nation.

Audience members. Yes!

The President. Now, the other side—Mr. Romney and his allies in Congress—they've got a very particular idea about how we move this country forward. And it basically involves taking the country back.

Audience members. No!

The President. Their economic idea, you can summarize it really easily. They basically want to give \$5 trillion in new tax cuts, mostly for the wealthy, on top of the Bush tax cuts even if it means gutting investments in education, even if it means gutting investments in basic research, even if it means that we're not rebuilding America's infrastructure, even if it starts cutting into benefits that we're providing to our veterans. The basic idea is that if you help folks at the top, at the very top, and if you eliminate regulations that we've put in place to make sure banks can't just do whatever they want, or consumers aren't cheated by their credit card companies, or insurance companies can't take advantage of their customers—eliminate those regulations, cut taxes at the very top, that somehow, all those benefits are going to trickle down on you——

Audience members. No!

The President. ——that the economy is going to improve and you are going to benefit.

Now, I have to tell you, I think they're wrong. And the reason I think they're wrong, Virginia, is because we tried it. We tried it for most of the last decade. And what were the results? We ended up turning record surpluses into record deficits. Wages, incomes stagnated. Job growth sluggish. And it culminated in the worst financial crisis that we've seen since the 1930s.

Now, if you try something and it doesn't work, why would you try it again? Why would we want to go back to that?

I've got a different idea. I don't think top-down economics works. I believe that we grow this economy from the middle out, from the bottom up. I believe the heart and soul of this country is making sure that working people can feel some security in the middle class and we're growing our middle class and we're going back to that basic American bargain that says everybody gets a fair shot and everybody does their fair share and everybody is playing by the same set of rules. That's what I believe, and that's why I'm running for a second term as President of the United States of America.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Now, if you want a specific example of the differences between my approach, my vision—our vision—and the other side's version, let's look at the debate we're having about taxes right now.

I have cut taxes for middle class families by an average of \$3,900 since I've been in office. Because my attitude was working people were the ones who were hurt most severely by the crisis, and by the way, if they got a tax break, they were most likely to spend that money for necessities and put it back into circulation, and that would do the most for the economy.

So just in case some of your friends or neighbors, or Uncle Jim, who's a little stubborn and been watching FOX News—[*laughter*]*—and he thinks that somehow I raised taxes—let's just be clear: We've lowered taxes for middle class families since I came into office.*

Now, what I've said is that the way the law is set up right now, if we do nothing, on January 1, everybody's taxes go up. Everybody's income taxes go up on January 1 if Congress does nothing. So what I've said is now is not the time to raise taxes on the middle class. The economy is still fragile. We're still digging ourselves out of this hole. So let's provide certainty to 98 percent of Americans. Ninety-eight percent of Americans make \$250,000 a year or less; let's say to that 98 percent, your taxes will not go up.

And by the way, this is the first \$250,000 of income—which means that even millionaires would get a little tax break because for their first \$250,000, their taxes wouldn't go up.

The Republicans say they agree that middle class taxes should not go up. That's my belief. So what I've said is if we both agree that middle class taxes shouldn't go up, let's go ahead and get this done tomorrow. Let's get this done next week. What's the holdup?

Well, it turns out that the holdup is we've got a disagreement on the top 2 percent. The top 2 percent, folks like me, we don't need a tax break. And it turns out if you give us a tax break along with the 98 percent, that costs about a trillion dollars. We already benefited from most of the tax cuts over the last decade, so we don't need it, we're least likely to spend it. It's least likely to give a boost to the economy. We can't afford it because we're trying to bring down our deficit and trying to control our debt.

Now, the Republicans disagree with me on this. Mr. Romney disagrees with me on this. And my attitude is, well, that's fine, but let's not hold middle class folks hostage. The top 2 percent, those tax cuts, that will be settled in the next election. And I'm looking forward to having a debate, because if you say you want to bring down the deficit, but you're not willing to let tax cuts lapse for the top 2 percent, it tells me you're not serious about deficit reduction.

But we can have that debate. But in the meantime, let's go ahead and help middle class families right now. And so far, I have not gotten an okay from the other side on that. And that tells me I guess they're not that serious about deficit reduction.

Audience member. Those folks let him down. [*Laughter*]

The President. Now, but this is just an example of their broader theory. They think that if you just help wealthy investors, it helps everybody. I think the opposite.

Let's take small businesses. I've cut small business taxes 18 times since I've been in office. And by the way, 97 percent of small businesses make \$250,000 a year or less. So for 97 percent of small businesses, they'd also benefit if we went ahead and got that done right now.

So far, they haven't taken me up on this offer. But what this shows is the difference in philosophy, because I believe that if you're doing well, then the country does well. I believe if the small business person and the teacher and the construction worker and the firefighter and all those folks who put in a hard day's work every day, if they're doing well, then everybody does well.

That's my vision for America, and that's why I'm running for a second term as President of the United States.

I'm running because I want to make sure that every young person in America has a great education. I've got a plan to hire new teachers, especially in math and science. We've already expanded the Pell grant program to help make college more affordable, provide tax credits to middle class families to help make college more affordable. I want to keep on going and make sure that 2 million more people can go to community colleges to get trained in the jobs that exist right now and lower college tuition costs. That's why I'm running for President of the United States of America.

I'm running because I believe we should have manufacturing jobs created here in the United States. I don't think the auto industry is unique; I think there are a whole bunch of companies who we can attract back to the United States. But we're going to have to change our Tax Code and stop giving tax breaks to companies that ship jobs overseas. Give those tax breaks to companies that are moving back here to the United States of America, hiring American workers, making products stamped with three proud words: Made in America. That's why I'm running for President of the United States.

I am running for President because there are a lot of folks in Virginia who have served us in uniform with such bravery and dedication and patriotism, and I want us to keep faith with our troops and make sure that our Fundingveterans get the benefits that they have earned and that military families like Ricki's are getting the help that they need when their loved ones are fighting on our behalf.

But part of keeping faith is also making sure that we've got a smart national security strategy. And it also means making sure that we've got a strong economy to support a strong military. In 2008, I promised we would end the war in Iraq, and we've ended it. We are transitioning in Afghanistan and beginning to bring our troops home from that theater. We have gone after Al Qaida, decimated their leadership ranks, taken out Usama bin Laden. So now I think it's a good time for us to take half of those savings that we've gotten from winding down these wars, use half of it to pay for the deficit, use the other half to do some nation-building here at home.

Let's put Americans back to work rebuilding our roads and our bridges, building broadband lines into rural areas, making sure that we've got the best airports and the best rail lines in the world. That's why I'm running for President of the United States, because I want to rebuild America and put people back to work.

Audience members. U.S.A.! U.S.A.! U.S.A.!

The President. I'm running because I want to build not just the best energy policy in the world here in the United States, I also want us to take the lead in clean energy. We've seen oil production go up. We're seeing natural gas production go up. And we've doubled our investment and production in solar and wind and biodiesel. I don't want us to be dependent on what happens in the Middle East for our energy. I want us to develop homegrown energy.

I want us to stop giving tax subsidies to oil companies that are already incredibly profitable. I want to double down on our investment in clean energy that's never been more promising—in solar and wind and biodiesel—and put people back to work so that we can free ourselves from dependence on foreign oil and build up America. That's why I'm running for a second term as President of the United States.

And I'm running so that we bring down our deficit and our debt in a balanced, responsible way. We've already made a lot of tough cuts to the Federal Government, and I'm prepared to do more. I don't believe that every Government program works. I don't believe that Government is the answer for every problem. We're not going to improve our schools unless our parents are focused on education. Americans can't be looking for handouts. There are some folks you can't help if they're not willing to help themselves. But what I also believe is, is that there are some investments like in education, or in basic research, or in transportation, there are basic investments we need to make to grow our economy.

And so if we're going to bring down our deficit in a sensible way that grows the economy and grows our middle class, it can't be based simply on cuts to basic programs and asking nothing from those who have been the most fortunate in this society. So what I've said is we'll make cuts, but we're also going to ask the wealthiest Americans like me to do a little bit more. And I promise you, we can afford it.

And by the way, the last time we did that, it worked. Bill Clinton did it, and we ended up having 23 million new jobs. We went from deficit to surplus, and we created a whole bunch of millionaires to boot. So don't tell me that that's going to destroy jobs. That's going to create jobs because we're doing it in a way that focuses on building the middle class. And there are a whole bunch of wealthy Americans who understand that and are willing to do the right thing if they're asked. And I'm prepared to ask them. That's why I'm running for President of the United States of America.

So we've got a lot of work to do. We've got a lot of work to do. And the way we're going to get it done is by you making a decision. There may be some—there are people who agree with Mr. Romney and his allies in Congress.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. No, no, that's how our democracy works. Even though the theory that they are promoting they've tried——

Audience member. Don't believe it!

The President. ——and it didn't work, they want to try it again. That's the way our democracy works.

But you know what, I'm betting that the American people, they don't want to go backwards.

Audience members. No!

The President. You don't want to refight the fight we had in health care. Let me tell you: Health care was the right thing to do. If you already have health care, the only thing this bill does is make sure that it's even more secure and insurance companies can't jerk you around. It allows young people to stay on their parent's health insurance plan; 6 million young people have already benefited from that program.

It lowers prescription drug costs for seniors. It guarantees preventive care for everybody, including women. Thirty million people are going to be able to get health insurance that didn't have it before, and that means—and we'll help them get it. And the only thing that we have said is if you can afford to get health insurance and you don't, you can't pass those costs on to somebody else. You've got to take responsibility; that's part of the American way. So we're not going to refight that battle.

I noticed the House of Representatives—the Republicans in the House of Representatives, they voted to repeal it again. That was the 33d time they've done that. *[Laughter]* Thirty-three votes to repeal the health care bill; all it would take is one vote to make sure that all of you don't see your taxes go up next year. You tell me what would be a better use of time.

Mr. Romney doesn't think we should have a timetable for getting out of Afghanistan. I disagree. I don't want to go backwards; I want to go forwards. The other side says they want to go back to the days when you could not serve the country you love because of who you love. I disagree. I don't want to go backwards; I want to go forwards.

Mr. Romney says that undocumented workers in this country should self-deport. My belief is that we are a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants, and I want to make sure that we get comprehensive immigration reform that gives young people who've been raised here a chance to live out their own American Dream. I don't want to go backwards; I want to go forward.

All these things that I'm talking about, it all goes back to that first campaign I ran. It all goes back to my family and your family and this basic idea of how we make sure that the middle class is strong and growing in this country; how do we make sure that folks who aren't quite there yet, if they work hard enough, can get into that sense of security and take care of their families. And you know what, we have learned from our history that that's done together.

When previous generations funded the GI bill or built the Hoover Dam and the Golden Gate Bridge or sent a man to the Moon or invested in the basic research that created the Internet, they didn't do that because it was going to benefit one person or a handful of people or one group. They did it because they understood we rise or fall together, as one people. And that's how I want to move this country forward, together, as one people. And that's why I'm running again as President of the United States.

But if I'm going to get there, I'm going to need you. The way this democracy works, the choice is going to be up to you. And over the next 4 months, you are going to see more negative ads than you've ever seen in your life. You're going to start getting out that DVR to block them out and fast-forward and all that stuff.

And the other side, they basically just have one argument, which is the economy is not where it should be and it's Obama's fault. And they'll just keep on repeating that over and over again because they know they don't have new ideas. They know the American people wouldn't just buy what they're selling on its own. So they don't want to talk about what they're going to do; they just want to talk about what hasn't gotten done.

And that may be a way to try to win an election, but it's not a plan to create jobs. It's not a plan to strengthen the middle class. And I don't care how much money they spend. What you taught me in 2008 is that when regular folk, when working people, when all of you tap into that basic decency and goodness of the American people, when you focus on what's true and what's right and you cut through all the nonsense and all the noise and all the spin and you remember your families and your parents and your grandparents and everything they did to give you the opportunities that you had, then you can't be stopped.

When you decide change is going to happen, change happens. When you decide we're moving forward, we move forward.

That's what you taught me in 2008. And some of you will remember, in that campaign I told you I'm not a perfect man—Michelle told you that too—[laughter]—and I told you I wouldn't be a perfect President. But what I told you was I'd always tell you what I thought, I'd always tell you where I stood, and I would spend every single day that I have the privilege of having this office thinking about you and fighting as hard as I knew how to make your lives a little bit better.

I made that promise because I saw myself in you and I saw Michelle in you. And when I look at your kids, I see my kids. And when I look at your grandparents, I see my grandparents. And because of the values we share, I believe in you. And I hope you still believe in me. Because I've kept that promise, and I fought for you, and I'm going to keep on fighting for you as long as I have a chance to be your President.

And if you're willing to stand up with me and knock on doors with me and make phone calls and get out and organize, then we'll finish what we started in 2008, and we'll remind the world just why it is that the United States of America is the greatest nation on Earth.

God bless you. And God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:05 p.m. at Green Run High School. In his remarks, he referred to Virginia Beach, VA, resident Ericka D. Thompson; Paul Hirschbiel, owner and president, Eden Capital; and Republican Presidential candidate former Gov. W. Mitt Romney of Massachusetts. He also referred to his sister Maya Soetoro-Ng; mother-in-law Marian Robinson; and brother-in-law Craig M. Robinson.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Campaign rallies :: Virginia Beach, VA.

Locations: Virginia Beach, VA.

Names: Clinton, William J.; Hirschbiel, Paul; Kaine, Timothy M.; Miller, Yvonne B.; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Robinson, Craig M.; Robinson, Marian; Romney, W. Mitt; Soetoro-Ng, Maya; Thompson, Erika D.; Warner, Mark R.

Subjects: Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Armed Forces, U.S. : "Don't ask, don't tell" policy, repeal; Armed Forces, U.S. : Military families; Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Budget, Federal : Government programs, spending reductions; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Strengthening efforts; Business and industry : Manufacturing industry :: Strengthening efforts; Business and industry : Small businesses :: Promotion efforts; Communications : Broadband technology; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: Promotion efforts; Energy : National energy policy; Energy : Oil and gas industry :: Subsidies, elimination; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Iraq : U.S. and coalition forces, withdrawal; Taxation : Tax Code, reform; Taxation : Tax cuts, budgetary effects; Taxation : Tax relief; Terrorism : Al Qaida terrorist group; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts; Veterans Affairs, Department of : Funding; Virginia : Democratic Party events; Virginia : President's visits.

DCPD Number: DCPD201200554.